



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

An organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system

Medicinal Herb Recipes

By Sarah Flack – NOFA VT Organic Dairy & Livestock Technical Assistance Program

Cows grazing in a pasture are constantly eating plants that have some medicinal effects. Dandelions are a diuretic, plantain has antimicrobial compounds, trefoil and alfalfa contain tannins and then there are all the plants growing in the hedgerows. Many farmers buy and use products made from medicinal herbs and while this is more convenient than making products yourself, many herbal products are simple and economical to make at home.

This article presents a brief overview of just a few recipes. There are several books available which provide more detail on which plants to use, dosage size and specific information on the best way to prepare certain herbs. Some of the book titles will be supplied at the end of this article

Making your own herbal teas and infusions: After picking or digging the plant (root or leaf), dry them in a dark, dry warm location. You can use screen racks, or simply tie plants in bunches and hang them in a pantry or cupboard. Roots usually take longer to dry and often will dry better if you slice them thin. After they are dried, you can store them in (labeled) glass jars or bags in a dry location out of the light.

To brew a tea, just add hot water to the dry plant material. If you are brewing larger batches you can use a bucket with the plant material in a cheesecloth bag. You can also mix everything together in the bucket and then strain it through a sieve.

To make a stronger brew (decoction), simmer the plant material in a pot (stainless is best) and then turn off the heat and let it cool with the lid on. This is most often used with roots but can also be used to make a stronger leaf or flower brew.

The amount of dry plant material to use varies a lot based on what type of plant you are using. Some plants are safe to use in large doses, while others need to be used carefully in small amounts.

Pinkeye spray or eyewash: *This recipe was given to me by a nearby organic dairy farmer. I've seen other versions of this recipe, which also work well for early symptoms of eye irritation. Make a strong tea or decoction of calendula flowers. After it has cooled, strain the liquid and add to it several pellets each of homeopathic hypericum (St. Johnswort) and homeopathic Euphrasia (eyebright). Some farmers also add homeopathic aconite. It is easiest to*



PO Box 697 · 39 Bridge St., 2nd Floor · Richmond, VT 05477
NOFA Tel: 802-434-4122 · VOF Tel: 802-434-3281 · Fax: 802-434-4154
www.nofavt.org



administer from a spray bottle, and should be kept in the fridge when you are not using it. Make up a fresh batch frequently.

Making your own tinctures: A tincture is made by putting plant material in alcohol (either pure or a mix of water and alcohol). To get started, pick or dig the plant material, cut it up or dice it and place it in a glass jar. A wide mouth canning jar works well. Pour alcohol (most people use vodka) over the plant material so that it is completely covered. Put the lid on the jar and store it for about 6 weeks and be sure to label the jar. You can either leave the plant material in the alcohol until you need it, or you can pour it through a sieve and store just the fluid tincture. Store the alcohol tincture in glass jars or dropper bottles and compost the plant material.

Tinctures can also be made with vinegar or glycerin if you prefer not to use alcohol. An alcohol tincture will have a very long shelf life, so you can make a large batch and store it. There are some excellent books which describe which parts of the plant contains the most medicinal compounds as well as the best plant to alcohol ratio for each plant. There are organic alcohols available, although they are not always easy to find.

Garlic Tincture: This tincture is used commonly on organic dairy farms in fairly large quantities. Garlic is easy to grow and tincture. To make a high quality strong garlic tincture you will want to use plenty of fresh garlic bulb in your jar and the cloves should be chopped or crushed. The ratio most good quality garlic tincture is made at is 1:2 (one part garlic to 2 parts liquid). You can read more on the tincturing and use of garlic (and many other plants) in *Herbal Antibiotics* by S. Buhner.

Making salves: Once you know how to make an oil infusion and a simple salve, you can make many types of salves in your own kitchen. You'll need some olive oil, dried herbs and some beeswax. I prefer to use organic olive oil, and be aware that many toxic pesticides are used in bee hives, so you may want to find a local bee keeper who doesn't use chemicals and buy beeswax from them.

To make the oil infusion, it is easiest to start with herbs which are dry, otherwise your oils may mold. It is possible to make an oil infusion with fresh plants but will require closer management. There are several good books which can help you with this process. Fill a jar loosely with dry herbs and then pour oil over them. I use olive oil since it tends to be more stable than many other vegetable oils. Set the jar somewhere dry and warm (at least room temperature), put some cheesecloth securely on top to keep out dust and insects, and check it weekly to make sure no moisture has caused mold to start growing. It takes about 6 weeks for most oil infusions to finish. You can use many types of herbs in the salve. If you choose to use fresh plants in your oil, it is easier if you allow them to wilt so they have less water in them, and then keep the oils warm enough to encourage water to evaporate to prevent molding.

Salve for chapped teats: *The recipe I use includes comfrey leaf, calendula flower, plantain leaf, echinacea leaf and flower and yarrow flower. You can either make each different herb oil separately, or you can combine the herbs in one jar. Once the oil is finished, you'll need to add beeswax to create a salve with good spreading texture.*

Hints on adding the beeswax: *Don't heat it directly over a flame to melt as this can create a fire hazard. Using a pot of water as the hot water bath, put all the ingredients (oil and beeswax) into a glass Pyrex measuring cup and set that in the water to melt. The ratio of oil to wax will determine the texture of your salve. My favorite ratio for a salve is 6:1, so put 6 ounces of oil in the measuring cup, and then add chips of beeswax till the liquid level in the cup rises to 7 oz total. After the mixture is melted, you can pour it into small jars and let it cool. Be sure to label it. In the summer if your salve is too soft you can increase the amount of beeswax in your recipe.*

USEFUL HERB BOOKS

Herbal Antibiotics by Stephen Buhner

Treating Dairy Cows Naturally: Thoughts and Strategies By Hue Karreman

Peterson's Guide to Medicinal Plants. Steven Foster/James A. Duke

The Complete Medicinal Herbal by Penelope Ody

A Modern Herbal by Mrs M. Grieve. In Two Volumes published in 1931

The New Holistic Herbal by David Hoffman

Earthly Bodies and Heavenly Hair by Dina Falconi (good information on making salves)